

Keys to effective graduate training

by Kenneth B. Mulholland

What are some keys to effective training in missions at the graduate or post-college level? This is an important question because graduate level missiological training is on the increase, both for pre-field candidates and for mid-career missionaries.

Since Columbia's emphasis is primarily, though not exclusively, on pre-field missiological training at the master's degree level, I will concentrate on this area. The following suggested keys grow out of almost five years of teaching, following nearly 15 years of missionary service in Central America.

The first key is to recognize that effective graduate training means adult education: androgogy rather than pedagogy. I find that graduate level missionary candidates are generally highly motivated to learn. They have not entered graduated school because of government regulations, parental pressure, or financial promise. They are there because they want to be there—often at great personal sacrifice.

These persons are not late adolescents, but young and middle-aged adults. They possess an immense variety of experiences. A good percentage have traveled widely, served as short-term missionaries, held office in the local congregation. Some have been engineers, lawyers, soldiers, physicians, teachers, nurses, accountants. More than half are married and many of the couples have children. These persons are oriented toward problem solving. They have much to offer as well as much to learn. Graduate school students are an incredible resource for learning. How often I have lectured on the historical development of missions in a given country only to discover that one of the students had been there more recently than I. Or I have used an illustration or case study only to learn that a participant in that situation was present in my classroom.

Effective graduate training in missions is adult education. It views the students as junior colleagues in ministry rather than passive receptacles to be filled with the lore of missiology.

The second key is to build flexibility into the training program. For us this has meant the creation of separate tracks of study for the M.A. in Christian education and M. Div. students: North American and cross-cultural. In the M.A. program it has led to the elaboration of concentrations in missions and intercultural studies, with the added possibility of earning a TESOL certificate.

True, all missionary candidates need a thorough grasp of the content and interpretation of the Scriptures, an understanding of the missionary enterprise, evangelistic skills, guidelines for personal Christian living, and a sense of commitment to the place of the local congregation in God's plan of discipling the nations. These basic elements usually comprise the minimum requirements for most Boards. Columbia's one-year certificate program, designed especially with the secular university graduate in mind, provides a minimally adequate background for persons teaching in MK schools, ministering in a

geographically distant but culturally similar setting in which previously learned skills are used, or where one continues to practice his own profession. For those planning to engage in a tentmaking ministry, this initial year may be sufficient.

Persons whose ministries will involve the penetration of another culture, in which the articulation and communication of the faith are a central aspect of ministry, need to enhance their cultural awareness and develop their communication skills. Required courses in biblical theology and the history of missions come alive as students delve into cultural anthropology, animism, cross-cultural communications, church growth, and such elective areas and language learning, Third World perspectives and area studies. Cross-cultural Christian education, missions, or inter-cultural studies build on the certificate program. For the Bible college graduate, the M.A. can be earned in a single year. It provides more flexibility in order to fill in the gaps of the undergraduate education which probably provided a thorough Bible knowledge, but usually an uneven study of missions.

The cross-cultural M.Div. program prepares the candidate for a leadership role in the local church. It aims to prepare both church planter and developers as well as those who labor in the area of training national leadership. A cross-cultural internship is a must and concentrations in Christian education, counseling, and New Testament studies are available.

The third key to effective graduate education is orientation toward total life training. Effective missionaries are more than repositories of biblical information and missiological strategies. In addition to the development of intellectual acumen, graduate as well as undergraduate training must involve social, spiritual and physical development.

Interpersonal conflicts hinder missionary effectiveness. Required course work in interpersonal relationship, small group participation, and peer evaluation should be part of the training process. Some provision must be made for including the spouse in the training.

Spiritual training is often assumed at the graduate level, or held to be the exclusive responsibility of the local church. Graduate education needs to build spiritual formation into the training process. Courses on the ministry of prayer, the history of revivals or awakenings, and principles of Christian living have a place in the graduate school instruction. Likewise, instruction and involvement in ministries of evangelism and discipling are crucial areas for graduate training.

A fourth key to effective missionary training lies precisely in the phrase “for the contemporary world.” Candidates for missionary service need to know the contemporary world in which they will serve. They need to comprehend the worldview of the people among whom they will serve, whether it be shaped by Marxism, western secularism, animism, or one of the great world religious systems such as Hinduism, Buddhism, or Islam.

The previous background of graduate students enables them to make the most of studies in such areas as anthropology, animism, and Third World perspectives. They are able to maximize what liberal arts background they have and utilize already developed critical and integrative skills. Many will already be capable researchers and most will have a reading speed that enables them to accomplish much in less time. Some will have capability in more than one language. Still others have already had cross-cultural experiences.

I have discovered that group projects often attain an extraordinary quality, and much of what is produced can be immediately used in extension programs, radio broadcasts, specialized publications, and local churches, not just in the seminar room. Those who opt to write a thesis can do original research to benefit the entire cause of missions. I personally encourage graduate students to write for the benefit of others as part of their ministry.

I heartily concur with Lyman E. Reed when he insists

The insights of anthropology are valuable tools in helping missionaries in their complex task ahead... the benefits of understanding cultural social structure and grouping of people are more and more being recognized today. Missionaries are excited about the clearer insights available to them through the behavioral sciences. These helps are much needed in the cross-cultural communication of the Good News. (Reed 1985:xii)

Furthermore, courses in contemporary theologies of missions and emerging Third World theologies allow students to discover that the theological agenda differs in other parts of the world. The added maturity of the graduate student enables him to sift through the burgeoning material emerging from the Third World, hold fast to what is useful in economic theories, liberation theologies, and indigenous culture while calling into question those motifs that are clearly unbiblical.

A fifth key to effective graduate training for contemporary missions is field-oriented learning. In a recent *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* issue Stephen T. Hoke, writing about undergraduate education, conceded that Jesus' non-formal approach to training is still the ideal model for helping students become effective missionaries. However, although the formal education process lacks the flexibility and tie required for such an experience, many elements of on-the-job training can be incorporated into resident missionary education. Cross-cultural internships during the summer, or even a complete year, and extended internships in ethnic churches while classes are in progress, open the way for such training. The maturity of most graduate students permits them to reflect profitably upon ministry experience while engaged in it. Field reports, laboratory sessions, or on-site visits make this key a vital and attainable one. Further, it enhances a student's legitimate confidence by allowing him to begin to do what he will be doing following graduation.

Graduate school missionary training for the contemporary world should aim to send out fully qualified missionaries. To do less is, as Kane suggests, "... unfair to the national churches and dishonoring to the Lord." (Kane 1978:176). Five keys to unlock the potential of graduate missiological training for pre-field candidates are adult education, curricular flexibility, total life training, contemporary world emphasis, and field oriented learning.

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Notes

- Kane, J. Herbert. *A Concise History of Missions*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.
- Hoke, Stephen T. *The Introduction to Missions Course-How to Prepare "World" Christians*. *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 1, pp. 68-80, Jan. 1985.
- Reed, Lyman E. *Preparing Missionaries for Intercultural Communication, A Bicultural Approach*. Pasadena: William Carey Library, p. 69.

Graduate training schemes. Whatever stage you're at in your studies you may be thinking about the things you can do to move into a new career or progress in your current one. There are different ways of getting into the career of your choice and understanding the differences can help you make the right choice for your career and circumstances. Graduate trainee schemes can be a great way to start building your career. They tend to be offered by large organisations but more and more small and medium-sized companies (SMEs) are starting to offer similar kinds of roles. Competition for these positions is fierce so the key is to research potential recruiters and apply for these schemes early. Applying for a graduate scheme is a long process, usually with interviews and assessment centres.